(a) the number of new branches of nationalised banks proposed to be opened in rural areas of Meghalaya State during 2000-2001, district-wise;

(b) the details of proposals under consideration for opening new branches in Meghalaya during the above period; and

(c) the action taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI BALASAHEB VIKHE PATIL): (a) to (c) Under the Extant Policy of Reserve Bank of India (RBI), it is left to the judgment of the individual banks to assess the need for opening additional branches within their Service Areas subject to the availability of infrastructure and viability of the branch. RBI have reported that out of 179 branches of scheduled commercial banks in Meghalaya as on 31.12.1999, there are 131 branches in rural areas. RBI have further reported that there are no authorizations pending for opening of branches in rural areas nor any fresh applications received, from Commercial banks, for opening of branches in rural areas in Meghalaya.

Inadequate staff strength in customs office at Bangalore

5415. SHRI K.C. KONDAIAH: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that the staff strength in Customs Office at Bangalore is inadequate to meet the demand and no customs escorts are available in Bangalore to be on Hyderabad-Muscat flight *via* Bangalore and Kochi; and

(b) if so, the action taken or proposed to be taken to post required number of staff to customs office at Bangalore?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI V. DHANANJAYA KUMAR): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Proposal for sanction of separate staff for Bangalore Airport is under active consideration by the Government.

Assam Government request for financial assistance on account of pay revision

5416. DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) the steps taken by the Central Government towards solution of financial problem faced by the States on account of recent revision of pay structure of State employees;

(b) whether Government of Assam has approached the centre for financial support to pay much arrear of DA and revised scale of the State Government employees on the basis of the Fifth Pay Commission recommendation; and

(c) if so, the total amount of arrear of pay and DA involvement on the above?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI BALASAHEB VIKHE PATIL): (a) Government of India have been assisting States facing financial stress, on account of revision of pay structure, by advancing plan and non-plan assistance linked to a package of fiscal reforms to be initiated by the States. During the last year, Government of India also gave Extended Ways & Means support to those States who had finalised acceptable and monitorable fiscal reforms programmes.

(b) The State Government of Assam had sought financial support for this purpose in the year 1997-98.

(c) The arrears on account of revision of pay structure with effect from 1.1.1996 had been estimated to be around Rs. 1400 crores.

SC/ST vacancies in Ministry of Finance

5417. SHRI RAM DEO BHANDARY: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Dr. Ambedkar Birth Centenary Celebrations Committee recommended to fill the backlog of vacancies reserved for the SCs/STs in 1993;

(b) if so, the action taken thereon and results achieved, if any;

(c) if not, the reasons for the same;

(d) the number of vacancies reserved for SCs/STs which remained unfilled as on 01.01.1993 in Class I, II, III and IV category under the Ministry of Finance and its autonomous/statutory/attached offices and action taken to fill these vacancies; and

(e) the backlog of vacancies for the SCs/STs in all grades as on 20.08.1997?